

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4125
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AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 1921

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, ES
SUBJECT: ATMOSPHERICS AS EL SALVADOR WAITS OUT BORGONOVO
KIDNAPPING

SUMMARY. THE KIDNAPPING OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER IS THE
LATEST IN A SERIES OF EVENTS WHICH HAS KEPT THE COUNTRY IN
A STATE OF ALMOST CONSTANT JITTERS SINCE MID-1976. PROBLEMS
RELATED TO THE CHANGE OF REGIMES, COMPOUNDED BY LAST YEAR'S
AGRARIAN REFORM SQUABBLE, KIDNAPPINGS AND TENSIONS IN THE
RELATIONSHIP WITH THE USG, HAVE CREATED AN ATMOSPHERE IN
WHICH EACH NEW OCCURENCE FINDS FERTILE GROUND FOR PRODUCING
GREATER TENSION AND CONCERN. THE GOVERNMENT'S REACTIONS,
OR LACK THEREOF, HAVE NOT HELPED. NOR HAVE PRESIDENT
MOLINA'S LAME DUCK STATUS OR ROMERO'S SUSPECTED BEHIND-THE-
SCENE'S INVOLVEMENT. RESULT - THE STATE OF SIEGE GOES ON.
END SUMMARY.

1. EL SALVADOR HAS BEEN IN A STATE OF TENSION FOR
WELL OVER EIGHT STRAIGHT MONTHS. ALTHOUGH BUSINESS,
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COMMERCIAL AND SOCIAL LIFE HAS CONTINUED FOR THE MOST
PART UNIMPAIRED, DURING THIS PERIOD, AN ASSORTMENT
OF EVENTS, MANY CONNECTED WITH THE TRANSITION OF
POWER FROM THE MOLINA REGIME TO ITS SUCCESSOR, HAVE
SENT RIPPLE AFTER RIPPLE OF PANIC AND APPREHENSION THOUGH
THE POPULACE.

2. THIS ROLLER COASTER OF EMOTION AND JITTERS CAN BE TRACED BACK TO A SPECIFIC DATE - JULY 1, 1976 - WHEN TWO CONTIGUOUS ANNOUNCEMENTS WERE MADE. THE FIRST WAS THAT GENERAL ROMERO WOULD BE THE GOVERNMENT'S CANDIDATE TO REPLACE MOLINA. THE OTHER WAS REVELATION OF THE FIRST PROJECT SPECIFICS OF ISTA, THE AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM.

3. ROMERO'S CANDIDACY, HIS QUEST FOR THE PRESIDENCY AS "EL LIDER" AND THE INCERTITUDE OF THE CAMPAIGN CULMINATED IN FRAUD AND MANIPULATION ON ELECTION DAY, THE OPPOSITION'S OCCUPATION OF THE PLAZA LIBERTAD, ITS FORCED CLEARANCE BY TROOPS AND THE DISTURBANCES WHICH FOLLOWED IN THE STREETS.

4. THE CONCURRENT FRICTION AND CONCERN SURROUNDING THE ISTA CRISIS PRODUCED ADDITIONAL RUMORS AND FEARS, WHICH ONLY ADDED TO EVERYONE'S NERVOUSNESS. EVEN AFTER PRESIDENT MOLINA LANCED THE ISTA BOIL WITH THE SINGLE STROKE OF ACCEPTING THE PRIVATE ENTERPRISE SECTOR'S "SUGGESTED CHANGES", THE EMOTIONS AND FEARS THAT THE CONTROVERSY HAD PROVOKED CONTINUED TO REVERBERATE THROUGHOUT THE SYSTEM. THE FACT THAT MOLINA WENT SO FAR AS TO ANNOUNCE A FIRST AGRARIAN PROJECT, AND HIS UNEXPECTEDLY STRONG, ALMOST STUBBORN DEFENSE OF IT, CAUSED MANY WITHIN THE ECONOMIC ELITES TO LOSE ALL FAITH IN HIS MOTIVES, IF NOT HIS BASIC INTELLIGENCE. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS ABRUPT CAPITULATION TO ANEP PRESSURE THEN COST HIM WHATEVER SUPPORT HE HAD

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GENERATED WITHIN GROUPS ADVOCATING REFORM. MOLINA EMERGED FROM THE ISTA CRISIS CONFIRMED IN HIS LAME DUCK PRESIDENT STATUS, AS A LEADER WHOSE ONLY MOTIVE WAS TO HOLD ONTO OFFICE UNTIL JULY 1. THAT STATUS HAS NOT HELPED THE NATION'S SENSE OF WELL-BEING.

5. SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR, THE GOES HAS RECEIVED ONE BLOW AFTER ANOTHER TO ITS PRESTIGE AND SELF-IMAGE. THE MAJOR ONES WOULD INCLUDE: THE FEBRUARY KIDNAPPING AND DEATH OF ROBERTO POMA, SYMBOL OF A CONCERNED NEW GENERATION OF LEADERSHIP; THE FEBRUARY 20 ELECTION AND ITS AFTERMATH IN THE STREETS; THE MARCH FRASER SUBCOMMITTEE HEARINGS WITH TESTIMONY OF FRAUD AND REPRESSION; THE RICHARDSON CASE AND RELATED PROBLEMS WITH THE USG; A CONFRONTATION WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, DEEPENED BY THE MARCH 12 ASSASSINATION OF A JESUIT PRIEST; AND NOW THE SPECTACULAR KIDNAPPING OF THE COUNTRY'S FOREIGN MINISTER. ALL THIS TOGETHER HAS PRODUCED ACUTE EMBARRASSMENT AND FRUSTRATION

WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT AND, BY EXTENSION, THE POPULACE
AS A WHOLE.

6. WHICH BRINGS US DOWN TO TODAY. ALTHOUGH THE
EVENTS THEMSELVES ARE BAD ENOUGH, THE GOVERNMENT IS
COMPOUNDING THE NATION'S DISQUIET BY ITS EVASIVENESS
IN EXPLAINING WHAT IS HAPPENING. SEVEN DAYS AFTER
RECEIPT OF THE FPL'S KIDNAP DEMANDS FOR RELEASE OF
THE FOREIGN MINISTER, THE REGIME HAS YET TO MAKE A
PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE EVENT OR THE REGIME'S
INTENTIONS. RUMORS ABOUND OF FRICTION BETWEEN THE
SITTING PRESIDENT AND HIS SUCCESSOR, COMPLICATED BY
SPECULATION AS TO WHO IS CALLING THE SHOTS, MOLINA
OR ROMERO. WITH THE GOVERNMENT TAKING NO APPARENT
ACTION, OTHERS HAVE MOVED INTO THE VACUUM. THE
MEDIA HAVE CARRIED THE TEXTS OF SEVERAL COMMUNIQUE
FROM A GROUP CALLING ITSELF THE "WHITE WARRIOR UNION"
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(UNION GUERRERA BLANCA - UGB), WHICH VOWS
RETALIATION AGAINST ALL LEFTISTS IF THE GOVERNMENT
YIELDS TO THE TERRORISTS' DEMANDS IN THE BORGONOVO
CASE, OR IF THE MINISTER IS KILLED. EMBASSY CONTACTS
BELIEVE THE UGB EXISTS, AND IS MOST LIKELY RECEIVING
MONIES FROM THE ANEP AND FARO TYPES WHO EMERGED
FROM THE ISTA CONFRONTATION CONVINCED OF THE
RIGHTNESS AND STRENGTH OF THEIR CAUSE.

7. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THE GOVERNEMENT HAS
DECIDED TO EXTEND THE STATE OF SIEGE IMPOSED ON
MARCH 1 FOR A THIRD PERIOD OF THIRTY DAYS. WE CAN
EXPECT THAT THE GOES WILL MAINTAIN THIS SUSPENSION
OF CERTAIN PORTIONS OF THE CONSTITUTION DOWN TO
ROMERO'S INAUGURATION ON JULY 1.
LOZANO

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